

A Special Section

The Assembly: Key to UN's Future

A World of Patience

by Trygve Lie

FOR THE SAKE of mental equilibrium, one generality and several specific facts deserve to be borne in mind as the United Nations General Assembly meets in New York for the second part of its first session. The generality, which must be repeated at the risk of appearing to be prosaic or positively banal, is that no lasting peace was ever made in one day. Most of the dismay which has been caused by dissension in the Security Council or by failure to reach agreement on various matters at the Paris Peace Conference has been due to the failure of the public to recognize this elementary truth.

Without asking people to blind their eyes to the very obvious fact that there are strong differences between the powers, it is legitimate to ask them to remember that such differences were inevitable in the first place and that, with the best will in the world, it would have required a great deal of time and a large amount of give and take to settle them. What the people have a right to demand, of course, is that the process of give and take shall be practised by all countries which are parties to international discussions, right up to the point at which the basic principles of international decency and order are at stake. It is only proper, and it will contribute to the durability of the peace, if questions of principle are thoroughly discussed in open forum so that the agreements reached may satisfy the demands of honor and legitimate interest.

Those who are tempted to grow impatient at the delay in a final settlement of the peace may find it helpful to recall that the Second World War was prosecuted by the United Nations against Germany long after an equivocal, patched-up armistice was possible. Impatience for the end of the war was not allowed to prevent the Allies from continuing until they had won a real and lasting victory. Without tolerating delay, where delay is caused by national vanity or pure stubbornness, we can also demand patience of ourselves where delay is occasioned by the need for a

careful examination of the facts and the interests of various countries.

What deserves to be remembered in following the proceedings of the United Nations, in the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council or the Assembly, is that they are directly affected by relations of the major powers which are being threshed out at the present time in the Council of Foreign Ministers and by other direct contacts outside the United Nations itself. It is inevitable that the differences which exist between the powers are reflected in the organs of the UN. As those differences are settled—as they must be—our deliberations will be assisted accordingly.

It must be remembered at all times that under the terms of the Charter which bestowed the right of veto upon each of the five principal powers, the United Nations has not been placed in a position to pass judgment on differences between the principal powers against the wishes of any one power. That means the powers must order their differences among themselves. So while we must practise patience, it is urgent that the outstanding differences be settled as quickly as possible.

The function of the United Nations and its various organs, as far as disputes between the powers are concerned, is thus limited to a large extent to serving as a sounding board and a forum in which the nations may air and discuss their differences. This, in itself, is a function of the greatest importance, which no other organ in history has been able to serve. Even when the League was at its greatest strength it could never hope, because of the absence of key nations from its membership, to serve as so universal a forum.

AN INSTRUMENT OF LASTING PEACE

The first of the specific facts which cannot be escaped by anyone who wishes to make a serious appraisal of United Nations proceedings is the overriding fact that no nation—and certainly no nation with the power to make war in this day and age—has anything whatsoever to gain by armed conflict. The nations which emerged from the Second World War as members of our victorious coalition are all sadly oppressed by domestic problems, varying in severity but in all cases of sufficient gravity to occupy the full attention and ability of statesmen. Certainly no responsible statesman today believes that these problems can be either obliterated or relieved by taking up arms.

Any calm appraisal of the situation in which the nations find themselves leads one to the conviction that we are in one of those periods when peace, for the time

As the delegates of the United Nations General Assembly convene at Flushing for a meeting with far-reaching implications for the future of peace and of the UN, the New Republic editors present a special ten-page section devoted to the problems and promises of this, the common man's principal hope for world understanding.

being, is practically inescapable. So, with allowances for one of those accidents which it is our business to keep from happening by the constant ventilation of disputes, we should be able to look forward to a post-war interim in which we can perfect the United Nations organization, both as a neutralizer of conflicts and as a constructive instrument.

The second of the specific facts about the United Nations which may help to offset the effect of temporary delays and disappointments is that the organization, still in its infancy, is designed not only as an expedient to stop budding wars by the threat of concerted action but as a long-range, lasting instrument with the avowed object of preventing strife by the gradual elimination of the most basic causes of war. These are enumerated at length in Article 55 of the Charter, one of the most important and one of the least advertised sections of that document.

Through the Economic and Social Council, and with the assistance of a number of specialized agencies which are associated with the work of that Council, the United Nations is responsible for "the creation of conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations." In order to do so, according to Article 55, it must promote "higher standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress and development," solutions of international economic, social, health and related problems and international cultural and educational coöperation.

It will be obvious to anybody, and it is certainly obvious to those connected directly with the United Nations and associated organs, that such a program

will involve the organization in an endless series of operations, of many different types and replete with difficulties. The United Nations membership includes countries of every climate and condition, practising many different systems of government and economic methods, many of them in such straits that the sheer sense of self-preservation tends to incline them to resist any sacrifices of their immediate national interests. Yet it is the avowed intention of these nations to try to find common ground in the economic and social fields and it is one of our principal purposes to serve as an instrument through which they can do so.

In these fields the United Nations lacks even that modicum of compulsion which it has in the political-military sphere through the powers of the Security Council. The Economic and Social Council has no powers of compulsion; here everything must depend upon the common sense and farsightedness of the individual nations themselves. So here, as well as in the political field, we must be prepared to exercise great patience, understanding and good will.

What the public properly can demand, in return for this patience, is that the governments and their representatives shall refrain from obstructionism, shall be specific and clear in explaining their positions, shall be dominated by a spirit of good will and compromise and, at all times, shall conduct themselves as members of the modern world community.

International discussions cannot be run like a football game, with a definite time limit to the proceedings. But they can be run according to the rules and with a sense of sportsmanship, and, with the assistance of the United Nations, this must be done.

Procedure for Peace

AS PAUL-HENRI SPAAK opens the General Assembly's first meeting at Flushing Meadow, an agenda of 53 items faces the delegates. To discuss and act on these items in the six and a half weeks allotted the General Assembly will require some 40 plenary sessions and 400 committee meetings at Flushing and Lake Success. Some of the items will require long debate; some are just routine. In any case, efficient organization will be important in the success or failure of the session.

To meet this problem, the United Nations organization has evolved a procedural system designed to guarantee efficiency and present important and controversial items early in the session while there is still time for debate.

Belgium's Dr. Spaak, president of the Assembly, is assisted by seven vice-presidents—the delegation heads from the five big powers and from Venezuela and South Africa. These eight officers, together with the chairmen of the six permanent committees, make up the General, or steering, Committee. During this, the

second half of the first General Assembly session, the General Committee will pass on the agenda, decide which items shall be given preference in committee discussions and determine the procedure for admitting items from other UN branches. At present there is no provision for placing on the agenda the eight items which the Economic and Social Council wants discussed. For the first ten days of the session, additional items from UN members will also be accepted.

This work, essentially preliminary, will be carried out during the period when the General Assembly is hearing reports from the Secretary-General, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, and while the general debate on these reports progresses.

After the Assembly has approved the permanent agenda and concluded preliminary discussions, committee meetings at Lake Success will begin. Each of the six permanent committees will have a chairman, a vice-chairman, a rapporteur and a representative from